

## **Highly Competitive Field Set for 17<sup>th</sup> America's Challenge** ***More than Half the Teams Include Former Race Winners*** (Revised 10/5/12)

Five balloon teams representing four nations and featuring some of the world's greatest gas balloonists are preparing to compete in the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta's America's Challenge race for gas balloons. The race is set for launch, weather permitting, on Saturday October 6.

The object of the America's Challenge is to fly the greatest distance from Albuquerque while competing within the event rules. The balloonists often stay aloft more than two days and must use the winds aloft and weather systems to their best advantage to gain the greatest distance. Flights of more than 1,000 miles are not unusual, and the winners sometimes travel as far as Canada and the U.S. East Coast.

In contrast to hot-air balloons which generate lift by heating ambient air (the normal air we breathe), gas balloons use a lighter-than-air gas such as hydrogen or helium to create lift. This year, for the first time, all of the balloons in the America's Challenge will use hydrogen as the lifting gas. In previous races, competitors could choose to fly with either hydrogen-capable or helium-capable balloons. However, the worldwide helium shortage has made it impossible for the Balloon Fiesta to obtain helium this year.

Three of the five competing teams include at least one member who has previously won the America's Challenge, which should bode for an interesting and highly competitive race. The international field includes pilots from three countries and the first-ever Russian team to compete in the race.

- **Jonathan Mason and Clive Bailey, UK:** Jon Mason, a British citizen currently living in Australia, is the defending champion; this will be his first America's Challenge race flying as the primary pilot. Mason and British adventurer David Hempleman-Adams won last year, landing just short of the Canadian border in North Dakota and prevailing in one of the most tightly-contested duels in the history of the competition. They also set a new duration record of more than 70 hours aloft. In 2008, Hempleman-Adams and Mason became the first British team to win the world's other major gas balloon distance race, the Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett. This year, Mason teams with co-pilot Clive Bailey, who managed the team's ground support operations during last year's winning flight. Bailey, a professional balloonist, runs one of Great Britain's largest hot air balloon excursion companies.
- **Peter Cuneo and Barbara Fricke, USA:** The other half of that epic 2011 duel, the team that duked it out with the Brits for more than a day and hundreds of miles, is also back. Albuquerque's Peter Cuneo and Barbara Fricke have won the race twice (2001 and 2010), have finished second four times including last year, and in 2008 placed third in the Gordon Bennett. This year for the first time Cuneo and Fricke will fly a hydrogen balloon in the America's Challenge. Cuneo assisted Bert Padelt, America's distinguished builder of gas balloons, in developing an affordable hydrogen system for the American market and Cuneo and Fricke will fly this prototype balloon, which Padelt flew in the 2010 and 2011 America's Challenge races.
- **Mark Sullivan and Cheri White, USA:** 2008 America's Challenge champions Cheri White and Mark Sullivan were last year's fourth place team and finished third in the 2009 Gordon Bennett and a respectable sixth in the Gordon Bennett this year. For many years Sullivan and White held the flight duration record for the America's Challenge. Mark Sullivan, a multiple-award-winning competitor in both hot air and gas balloons and the American delegate to the world ballooning federation, is the founder of the America's Challenge.
- **J. Michael Wallace and Kevin Brielmann, USA:** Gas ballooning is loaded with tradition, and that tradition is embodied by Mike Wallace and Kevin Brielmann. Their *Spirit of Springfield* is the last traditional "netted" gas balloon still being flown in the United States (think *Around the World*

*in 80 Days*); their balloon is a piece of living history. Wallace and Brielmann are longtime distinguished international competitors who finished second in the Coupe Gordon Bennett in 1995 and 1996; they've competed in 10 previous America's Challenge races.

- **Leonid Tyukhtyaev, Russia, and Wilhelm Eimers, Germany:** This year for the first time, the America's Challenge welcomes a Russian pilot to the competition. Although he is an America's Challenge rookie, Leonid Tyukhtyaev (pronounced toot-KAI-ev) is no stranger to international competition. Tyukhtyaev and co-pilot Sergey Grishin have competed twice in the Gordon Bennett, including in this year's event where they came in fifth (and almost fourth – they were edged out by less than one kilometer). Tyukhtyaev, the head of the Russian Ballooning Federation, is perhaps even better known for his achievements in airships, holding world records in both hot air and gas airships.

At almost the last minute, Grishin, Tyukhtyaev's scheduled co-pilot, was unable to compete in the America's Challenge. His replacement is a formidable foe with many races' experience competing in the America's Challenge. Germany's Wilhelm Eimers is a three-time Coupe Gordon Bennett winner, and he's the guy who edged out Tyukhtyaev for fourth in this year's Gordon Bennett (see previous paragraph). Eimers also holds the world duration record for a Gordon Bennett/America's Challenge-type distance race of more than 92 hours aloft. Eimers' two sons, Sebastien and Benni, are providing ground support to the team.

The America's Challenge is the U.S. qualifier for the Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett. The top three American finishers are generally invited by the Gas Division of the Balloon Federation of America to represent the United States in the Gordon Bennett; the 2013 event will be held in Nancy, in the northeastern part of France.

The Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta Web site, [www.balloonfiesta.com](http://www.balloonfiesta.com), will feature live computerized tracking of all the balloons and race updates throughout the competition.

## Hydrogen vs. Helium in Gas Balloons

The fact that the America's Challenge is an all-hydrogen race this year is a first for the Balloon Fiesta, but it is the norm in most of the rest of the gas ballooning world. In parts of Europe, people fly gas balloons the way they do hot air balloons here – shorter day flights. Some launch sites in Germany are adjacent to industrial plants where hydrogen is a by-product; the balloonists just hook up their hoses, fill the balloon, and off they go. Hydrogen in Europe is cheap, and many U.S. gas balloonists have actually gone to Germany to train because it can be cheaper – even with airfare, hotel, etc. – than training here. The Gordon Bennett, when it is held in Europe, is an all-hydrogen race and the U.S. teams competing there use hydrogen.

The use of helium as a lifting gas in the US has been declining for some time, simply because the costs are so high. Helium, even when balloonists could get it, could be as much as 12X more expensive than hydrogen; entry fees in the Balloon Fiesta reflected the difference in cost. Last year, as this year, pilots flying with hydrogen paid \$500 entry fees, the entry fees for pilots flying with helium in 2011 were \$3,500. For pilots flying on their own, outside a race environment, a hydrogen "fill" for a single flight currently runs about \$1,000; whereas helium for a single flight is as much as \$12,000.

Given that, why choose helium? The America's Challenge for many years has been unique in that it offered competitors – with a financial difference in entry fees – a choice of lifting gases. If you want to start a really arcane technical discussion with gas balloon pilots, you can get into the competitive advantages and disadvantages of helium vs. hydrogen. Hydrogen is lighter, and since weight is a significant factor in gas ballooning would tend to create a bit of an advantage. But helium is molecularly more dense. So while helium is a heavier gas – a slight disadvantage – it is more stable than hydrogen

so less ballast is expended over time, increasing flight duration. It is suggestive, though there are many factors involved in the outcome of a race, that the top finishers in the last several America's Challenge races were flying with helium.

The other factor is economics in terms of the cost of balloon systems. Until recently, the only manufacturers of hydrogen balloons were in Europe, and the systems were very expensive (as much as \$80,000). Helium systems were much less expensive and were available from a U.S. builder, ergo, even with the difference in cost of gas, helium balloons were the choice of many US balloonists.

But in recent years, with helium becoming so expensive that flying outside of a competition like the America's Challenge is economically prohibitive, there has been a shift towards hydrogen. Three or four years ago, Bert Padelt, the distinguished US builder of gas balloons, began working with Peter Cuneo to develop a U.S.-built hydrogen balloon system. Padelt and Cuneo tested the prototype in Albuquerque in the spring of 2010 and Padelt and Louis Vitanza have flown it in two America's Challenge races. Cuneo and Barbara Fricke are flying this balloon in this year's race. Padelt has now built at least two additional hydrogen systems as the U.S. gas ballooning community evolves towards adopting hydrogen as a lifting gas.

The final straw for helium – at least for now – is that it is simply unattainable. There's a worldwide shortage of helium and it is difficult to get even for more mundane uses – and expensive when it can be obtained. The Balloon Fiesta tried for several months to obtain helium for this year's America's Challenge and couldn't. So this year, the race is all-hydrogen. This has meant helium balloons cannot be used, and several entrants that planned to fly helium systems had to cancel out of the race.

Hydrogen ballooning is quite safe with an appropriately-designed (conductive) system and when due precautions are taken to assure the balloons are grounded during inflation and sequestered from ignition sources.

## **America's Challenge Gearing Up**

6 PM Friday, October 5

Race officials are "cautiously optimistic" that the America's Challenge distance race for gas balloons can launch as scheduled Saturday evening, October 6. The launch is scheduled for 6:30 PM (0030Z) at Balloon Fiesta Park.

The race officials are continuing to monitor the forecast and will launch Saturday evening if it is safe to do so. If a Saturday launch is not possible, launch conditions on Sunday evening October 7 are expected to be excellent.

At the opening briefing Friday afternoon at 3 PM MDT (2100Z), officials covered inflation safety rules, Command Center operations, event scoring, and weather. Dave Pagliaro, the lead meteorologist for the Balloon Fiesta, told the teams that east canyon winds and 15 knot winds on the launch site could pose a challenge for a Saturday launch. Weather data indicates the balloons are expected to travel generally eastward across the country, with tracks suggesting the balloons will head into the Midwest or deep South. Some trajectories carry the balloons as far east as Virginia and North Carolina.

Officials also conducted the random drawing that determines the launch order for the race. All of the balloons launch from exactly the same spot at Balloon Fiesta Park, a raised platform adjacent to the inflation area. Balloons are "walked" one by one to the platform for launch.

Following are the team numbers and launch order for the race:

Team 1: J. Michael Wallace/ Kevin Briemann, USA  
Team 2: Leonid Tyukhtyaev. Russia / Wilhelm Eimers, Germany  
Team 3: Peter Cuneo / Barbara Fricke, USA  
Team 4: Jonathan Mason / Clive Bailey, Great Britain  
Team 5: Mark Sullivan / Cheri White, USA

Once the race begins, you can follow the competitors' progress via live tracking on the Balloon Fiesta website, [www.balloonfiesta.com](http://www.balloonfiesta.com). A free app for mobile devices is also available for download.

## **America's Challenge Launch Postponed 24 Hours Other Balloon Fiesta Events to Proceed as Scheduled**

America's Challenge race officials have announced the gas balloon launch originally scheduled for tonight (Saturday, October 6) will be postponed for 24 hours due to weather conditions. The launch is now scheduled for early Sunday evening, October 7. The Twilight Twinkle Glow and other Saturday evening events at Balloon Fiesta Park are not impacted by the delay and are continuing as scheduled.

Postponement of America's Challenge launches is not unusual, since the race is affected not only by conditions in Albuquerque, but also conditions downrange in the direction the balloons will travel. Gas balloons are less affected by wind during inflation than hot air balloons, but the wind needs to be calm enough for the balloons to launch safely. A Saturday night launch could also have resulted in balloons having to execute night landings near the East Coast. Forecast trajectories for a Sunday launch will most likely take the balloons into the Midwest.

America's Challenge officials will re-evaluate the weather tomorrow to determine if the race can proceed Sunday night. Preliminary indications are that the weather should be favorable for a Sunday evening launch.

Following are the team numbers and launch order for the race:

Team 1: J. Michael Wallace/ Kevin Briellman, USA  
Team 2: Leonid Tyukhtyaev. Russia / Wilhelm Eimers, Germany  
Team 3: Peter Cuneo / Barbara Fricke, USA  
Team 4: Jonathan Mason / Clive Bailey, Great Britain  
Team 5: Mark Sullivan / Cheri White, USA

Once the race begins, you can follow the competitors' progress via live tracking on the Balloon Fiesta website, [www.balloonfiesta.com](http://www.balloonfiesta.com). A free app for mobile devices is also available for download.

## **America's Challenge Update 10:30 AM Sunday, October 7**

It's been a gorgeous morning of ballooning in Albuquerque, and early indications are it will be just as gorgeous tonight as the America's Challenge distance race for gas balloons moves towards launch.

The pilots will meet with officials at 12 PM MDT (1800Z) to receive the latest information and a detailed weather briefing. At that time, a final determination will be made about plans for the remainder of the day. The weather forecast appears to be favorable for a launch sometime this evening (Sunday, October 7) in conjunction with the Balloon Glow. The pageantry of the gas balloon launch set against the background of hundreds of glowing hot air balloons makes for a truly unforgettable event.

Watch this site for regular updates as we progress towards launch and for live tracking of the balloons' progress across the country once the race begins.

## [America's Challenge Set for 6 PM Launch](#)

1 PM Sunday, October 7

The five teams competing in this year's America's Challenge race for gas balloons are busily moving equipment to Balloon Fiesta Park and preparing for inflation in anticipation of a launch this evening.

At the noon briefing, race officials advised the pilots to plan for a 6 PM MDT launch (0000Z), just before the hot air balloons inflate for tonight's scheduled Balloon Glow at Balloon Fiesta Park. Gas balloon hydrogen inflation should begin in the next two to three hours. The gas balloon inflation area will be cordoned off and access will be restricted, but guests will still be able to get a clear view of the process from outside the restricted area. The gas balloon launch combined with one of the world's largest hot-air balloon glows should be a spectacular sight for those visiting Balloon Fiesta Park.

The frontal boundary which passed through Albuquerque last night and caused the delay is now well clear of Albuquerque and high pressure is building in behind the front. Current forecast trajectory plots indicate that depending on the strategies chosen by the pilots, the balloons could travel into the Midwest or to the Florida panhandle.

Our tracking site should be live shortly, and you can watch this site for regular and live tracking of the balloons' progress across the country once the race begins.

## **Launch 'N' Glow! America's Challenge is Underway!**

**8:30 PM Sunday, October 7**

The 17<sup>th</sup> America's Challenge got off to a glowing start – literally – on a gorgeous fall evening in Albuquerque. With the setting sun painting the Sandia Mountains a gorgeous pinkish hue and hundreds of hot air balloons preparing to glow in the background, the five America's Challenge competitors headed out to destinations unknown – in all likelihood, to the east.

The competitors began inflation about midafternoon as the competitors meticulously prepared their craft for flight. These pilots literally make a list and check it twice, just like Santa. After all, they can't stop at the nearest convenience store!

Then, at 6 PM (0000Z) with the opening of the one-hour launch window, the officials called for the first balloon to be moved to the launch platform. The launch order is determined by random draw . . . but the random draw quickly went by the wayside as the very first strategies in the race began to play out. While teams are called to the platform in order, but have the prerogative to "pass," provided they make it aloft before the end of the window. In the first round, the first four teams all "passed," and as the US National Anthem played Team 5 – Mark Sullivan and Cheri White of the USA – ascended to the cheers of the crowd. While they were still in earshot, event announcer Tom Rutherford announced to the crowd that, "for now, Mark and Cheri are in first place!"

Team 3 – Peter Cuneo and Barbara Fricke of the US – were the second to launch, followed by Team 4, the British entry of Jonathan Mason and Clive Bailey. Team 2 – Russia's Leonid Tyukhtyaev and Germany's Wilhelm Eimers – made an especially exuberant entrance, with the always entertaining and flamboyant Eimers leading the team onto the platform before boarding the balloon.

Last to launch was Team 1, J. Michael Wallace and Kevin Brielmann, in their classic netted balloon "Spirit of Springfield." This balloon has made appearances all over the world in Gordon Bennett and America's Challenge races and is the last actively-flying netted gas balloon in the US. As Wallace and Brielmann took off, announcers called for the first "all burn" of the Balloon Fiesta's spectacular Balloon Glow.

Trajectory forecasts released this afternoon portend an eastward track, with landings in the Florida panhandle a possibility. At this writing some of the balloons have begun the swing to the east past the Sandias and out into New Mexico's eastern plains.

A fantastic fireworks show just ended here at Balloon Fiesta Park, but the America's Challenge fireworks are just beginning! Our tracking site is now live, and you can follow the balloons' progress across the country at [www.balloonfiesta.com](http://www.balloonfiesta.com) under "Gas Balloons" on the America's Challenge page. This page is also linked to the Balloon Fiesta's Facebook page, and I-Phone and Android users can follow the Balloon Fiesta and the America's Challenge via the Balloon Fiesta's free app. We'll provide updates and official landing reports on the site as the race progresses.

#### Event News & Updates

Oct 8, 2012 6:00 AM

### **Amarillo by Morning: America's Challenge Competitors Streak East**

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Approximately 12 hours into the competition, the five America's Challenge teams are already in Texas and headed eastward in the Amarillo area.

The early race leaders at this writing at about 6 AM MDT (1200Z) have traveled about 260 miles (420 KM). The top three teams – Team 3 (Cuneo/Fricke), Team 5 (Sullivan/White), and Team 4 (Mason/Bailey) are neck and neck, only a few miles separating them in the competition. Teams 4 and 5 may even be within eyesight of other, north of Amarillo, with Team 3 flying further south.

Team 2, the Russian/German team of Leonid Tyukhtyaev and Wilhelm Eimers, are following roughly the same track and are about 25 miles behind. Team 1, Mike Wallace and Kevin Brielmann, have traveled about 180 miles and are close to crossing the New Mexico-Texas border.

With the sun rising in the area the balloons are now entering, the balloons will be able to take advantage of solar heating and expansion of the gas within the balloon to gain altitude without expending ballast. The strategies will really begin to unfold, and you can follow it all at [www.balloonfiesta.com](http://www.balloonfiesta.com) and through the Balloon Fiesta's mobile app.

#### Event News & Updates

Oct 8, 2012 – 8:30 AM

### **America's Challenge Competitors Waltz Across Texas**

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**All five teams in the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta's America's Challenge distance race for gas balloons are making steady and fairly swift progress over northern Texas.**

The current leaders, Albuquerque's Peter Cuneo and Barbara Fricke (Team 3), have put a little distance on the field and are at this writing (8:20 AM MDT or 2020Z) about 15 miles (20 KM) ahead of their nearest pursuers. They appear to be pursuing a slightly different strategy which is taking them south of the rest of the field. They are approaching the 350 mile (about 550 km)-mark after being aloft for more than 14 hours.

Teams 4 and 5, (Mason/Bailey and Sullivan/White) have separated a bit but are still within a short distance from each other. Leonid Tuykhtyaev and Willi Eimers (Team 2) are not far behind and on relatively the same track near Pampa, TX. All of these teams are moving at a fairly good clip: 25-35 mph (40-60 km/hr).

Team 1, Mike Wallace and Kevin Briemann, are north of Dalhart, TX. The Command Center is currently not receiving tracker data from the balloon, but Mike is periodically reporting his position to the Command Center.

Weather data suggests the balloons will continue eastward across Texas and Oklahoma and across the southern US. The America's Challenge is always interesting and never predictable, but it's always fun to try to guess what the pilots are thinking. Follow the balloon's progress via live tracking at [www.balloonfiesta.com](http://www.balloonfiesta.com) and through the Balloon Fiesta's mobile app, and try to outguess the pilots yourself!

## Event News & Updates

Oct 8, 2012 – 7:30 PM

### All Teams Still Aloft as America's Challenge Enters Second Day

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**The area around Oklahoma City, OK got quite a balloon show this evening, as three of the five America's Challenge competitors head through the area.**

However, the leaders continue to forge their own path well to the south. Peter Cuneo and Barbara Fricke of Albuquerque (Team 3) passed just north of the Dallas-Fort Worth metro area and are at this writing headed towards the Texas/Arkansas/Louisiana border. Their speed in relation to the other balloons has slowed, and the field is slowly whittling away their lead.

That field includes second place Team 5 (Albuquerque's Mark Sullivan and Austin, TX's Cheri White) and the two international teams: Russia's Leonid Tuykhtyaev and Germany's Willi Eimers (Team 2) and British aeronauts Jon Mason and Clive Bailey (Team 4). All are at this writing in the Tulsa, OK area. Team 1, Mike Wallace and Kevin Briemann have taken a turn to the north and are headed north through Kansas.

It has been very quiet in the Command Center all day (hence, no updates from us), with very few contacts from the pilots and their crews. This is an indication that things are going very well for all of the teams. It is very unusual in an America's Challenge for all the competitors to still be flying at the end of the first full day, an indication of the quality of this year's small but formidable field.

Darkness has fallen in the center of the country, making it very likely all the teams will continue flying through the night. At this point, it appears three strategies are beginning to take shape: a "go north" strategy (Mike and Kevin), a "stay south" strategy (Peter and Barbara) and the middle ground being plowed by the other three teams. Which course will prove to be the winning one, and which teams will have the resources (gas and ballast) to outwit and outlast? Watch the race unfold through the night at [www.balloonfiesta.com](http://www.balloonfiesta.com) and through the Balloon Fiesta's mobile app.

## Event News & Updates

Oct 9, 2012 – 4:30 AM

### America's Challenge Lead Changes Overnight

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**Mark Sullivan and Cheri White (Team 5) are the new leaders in the America's Challenge gas balloon race, as the "middle pack" takes charge of the competition – at least for now.**

Sullivan and White took the lead at about 11:30 PM MDT (0530Z), and are currently just east of Little Rock, AK. The two international teams: Russia's Leonid Tuykhtyaev and Germany's Willi Eimers (Team 2) and British aeronauts Jon Mason and Clive Bailey (Team 4) are still in hot pursuit slightly to the north, with Team 4 near Springfield, MO, and Team 2 sandwiched in between east of Fayetteville, AK.

All three teams have now overhauled yesterday's leaders Peter Cuneo and Barbara Fricke of Albuquerque (Team 3). Cuneo and Fricke are flying further south and passed Shreveport, LA not long ago. The difference has been speed. Teams 5, 4, and 2 have simply been moving faster – in the 25-30 MPH (41-45 KH) range, compared to the 10-15 MPH (25 KH) range that Cuneo and Fricke have maintained through the night.

The fastest speed of all at the moment is being clocked by Team 1, Mike Wallace and Kevin Brielmann. They're maintaining a track well to the north of the other teams and are currently near the Kansas/Nebraska/Missouri border and headed towards Iowa at about 30 MPH (50 KH).

Sullivan and White are now moving in on the 850 mi (1,400 KM) mark as the competition nears the 36-hour mark. But it is now that the race will really begin to take shape. As the sun rises and warms the balloon envelopes, the hydrogen inside will expand and provide the balloons with extra lift – a "free ride," as it will, to altitude. If any of the teams are low on ballast – expendable weight like sand or water they can toss overboard to counteract the loss of gas through contraction – and need to land, sunrise will provide the opportunity to see landing sites.

We'll have a better idea of where things stand in the next few hours, as the race moves through its second day. You can track the race and cheer your favorites at [www.balloonfiesta.com](http://www.balloonfiesta.com) and through the Balloon Fiesta's mobile app.

## Event News & Updates

Oct 9, 2012 – 9:40 AM

### First America's Challenge Landing Reported

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**Four America's Challenge competitors remain aloft as the race nears the 40-hour mark. The fifth team, Mike Wallace and Kevin Brielmann (Team 1) have landed safely near Kellerton, Iowa on the Iowa/Missouri border.**

Wallace and Brielmann have been tracking along the leading edge of a cold front for much of the morning and reported a lot of wind in the area. Balloons in the America's Challenge frequently land in higher winds than would be customary for a hot-air balloon, since in an effort to gain the maximum distance they seek out fast winds.

The other four teams are flying in clear weather well to the south. Mark Sullivan and Cheri White (Team 5) are maintaining their lead and nearing the 1,000-mile (1,609 km) mark, and at this writing (9:45 AM/1545Z) are southeast of Memphis, TN. Leonid Tuykhtyaev and Germany's Willi Eimers (Team 2) and British aeronauts Jon Mason and Clive Bailey (Team 4) are still holding in second and third. Meanwhile, yesterday's leaders, Peter Cuneo and Barbara Fricke of Albuquerque (Team 3) have come back to life and are flying on a track that will eventually converge with the leaders. They are just crossing the Mississippi River near Greenville, MS.

As the race moves towards the two-day mark, we would note that under the race rules pilots have four hours to report their landing. The Command Center does not report balloons as having landed until the team makes an official report.

The big question now – which teams can go through a third night aloft, and which will have to land late this afternoon? Keep watching our live tracking site at [www.balloonfiesta.com](http://www.balloonfiesta.com) as the strategies unfold. You can also download the Balloon Fiesta's free app for mobile devices through this website.

## Event News & Updates

Oct 9, 2012 – 4:40 PM

### Defending America's Challenge Champion Lands

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**The Command Center has received word that the British team of Jonathan Mason and Clive Bailey has made a safe landing about 22 miles northwest of Madisonville, KY.**

Jon Mason is the defending America's Challenge champion, having won the race last year with David Hempelman-Adams. The team also won the Coupe Gordon Bennett the last time it was flown in Albuquerque in 2008.

Mark Sullivan and Cheri White (Team 5) continue to lead the race and have flown at this writing are near Chattanooga, TN, about 1,200 miles (1,930 km) from Albuquerque. Russia's Leonid Tuykhtyaev and Germany's Willi Eimers (Team 2) are still holding in second about 80 miles behind. Peter Cuneo and Barbara Fricke of Albuquerque (Team 3) have retaken third and are about 100 miles (160 KM) behind the lead.

And now the question becomes, which of the remaining three teams can stay aloft another night and which will have to land around sunset? The pilots must consider whether they have sufficient ballast (expendable weight) to jettison as the gas in the balloon cools overnight. And now another factor arises – they'll be approaching the U.S. East Coast. When and where they anticipate striking the coast will be crucial. Will they have to execute a night landing, or can they time their arrival with daylight?

The answers will unfold in the next few hours. You can catch the action on our live tracking site at [www.balloonfiesta.com](http://www.balloonfiesta.com) or by downloading the Balloon Fiesta's free app for mobile devices through this website.

## Event News & Updates

Oct 9, 2012 – 9:00 PM

### America's Challenge Teams Slip Silently Through the Night

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**The gold standard for having a shot to win the America's Challenge has always been the ability to fly through three nights. Three formidable teams have reached that standard, and now the question is who can prevail to win this distance contest as the teams near the U.S. East Coast.**

The leader board remains unchanged: Mark Sullivan and Cheri White have been in first place for nearly 24 hours, followed by Russia's Leonid Tuykhtyaev and Germany's Willi Eimers (Team 2) and Peter Cuneo and Barbara Fricke of Albuquerque (Team 3). However, at this point the international gents of Team 2 have the fastest track – they've been trucking along at about 30 MPH (50 km/h) for most of the evening. They are also on the most northerly track of all the teams and are steadily reeling in the leaders. At this writing the margin – once about 80 miles (129 km) – has been cut in half.

It is likely the teams will fly through the night, as weather conditions in the area are decent and the teams try to avoid night landings, opting for daylight when they can see landing sites. At their current track and speed, the teams will reach the East Coast sometime during the day tomorrow, and will be jockeying to try to get as far east on the coast as possible. The wild card, unknown to those in the Command Center, is how much ballast the teams have. Ballast – expendable weight – equals time aloft, and the teams with the most ballast remaining have a clear advantage.

All three teams are formidable competitors. Mark Sullivan and Cheri White have won the America's Challenge once (2008); Peter Cuneo and Barbara Fricke have won twice (2001, 2010). This is Tuykhtyaev's first America's Challenge (he finished fifth of 17 competitors in the most recent Coupe Gordon Bennett), and his co-pilot, Willie Eimers, is one of the world's great gas balloonists: three Gordon Bennett wins and three top three finishes in previous America's Challenge races.

It should be a thrilling denouement as the America's Challenge teams close in on the coast. Follow the action on our live tracking site at [www.balloonfiesta.com](http://www.balloonfiesta.com) or by downloading the Balloon Fiesta's free app for mobile devices through this website.

## Event News & Updates

Oct 10, 2012 – 5:30 AM

### Running Out of Real Estate: America's Challenge Teams Approach East Coast

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**Three teams, six pilots, and under 200 miles to go. As the day dawns in the Eastern time zone, three America's Challenge gas balloon teams are inexorably headed towards the Atlantic – and the end game.**

Leaders Mark Sullivan and Cheri White have now surpassed the 1,500-mile (2,400 km) mark and have already traveled farther than on any of their previous America's Challenge flights – including their 2008 win. They are currently near Fayetteville, North Carolina. Russia's Leonid Tuykhtyaev and Germany's Willi Eimers (Team 2) are also at the 1,500-mile mark and just 33 miles behind, over the Appalachian Mountains in Virginia. Peter Cuneo and Barbara Fricke of (Team 3) are southwest of Augusta, GA and about 150 miles behind the lead – but even their distance surpasses that of both of their previous wins (2001 and 2010).

All of the teams are achieving some of the fastest speeds of the race, closing in on the coast at about 30 MPH (48 km/h). At this rate, and absent issues with ballast or airspace, the Command Center anticipates the teams may land around midday – but as the pilots change altitudes and potentially direction, anything can happen. By the way, ditching in the ocean is against the event rules and hence not an option.

The America's Challenge distance record – 1,998 miles (3,215 km) set in 2000 – is not in jeopardy. It's likely the duration record of nearly 70 hours, set last year by David Hempelman-Adams and Jon Mason, will also not be surpassed. However, the top two teams, assuming no penalties are imposed, are sure to establish the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> longest flights in the America's Challenge's 17-year history.

We'll keep you posted as the teams near the coast on our live tracking site at [www.balloonfiesta.com](http://www.balloonfiesta.com). You can also download the free Balloon Fiesta app for mobile devices through this website.

## Event News & Updates

Oct 10, 2012 – 8:45 AM

### Teams Report Landings as America's Challenge Competitors Approach Coast

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**The Command Center has been advised that Team 2, Russia's Leonid Tuykhtyaev and Germany's Willi Eimers, have landed safely near Elkton, VA. Team 3, the USA's Peter Cuneo and Barbara Fricke, are down safely near Ridgeland, South Carolina.**

Leaders Mark Sullivan and Cheri White (Team 5) are approaching the coast and the Command Center anticipates a landing soon. Sullivan and White have flown more than 1,627 miles (2,618 km) and are the apparent winners of the race.

Tuykhtyaev and Eimers unofficially flew 1,555 miles (2,500 km) and are the apparent second place finishers. Cuneo and Fricke flew 1,455 miles (2,342 km), and are unofficially third in the race.

The Command Center does not report a landing until word is officially received from the teams. The teams have up to four hours under the event rules to report in to the Command Center. The tracking site at [www.balloonfiesta.com](http://www.balloonfiesta.com) remains live, and you can also download the free Balloon Fiesta app for mobile devices through this website.

## Event News & Updates

Oct 10, 2012 – 11:00 AM

### America's Challenge Unofficial Winners: Mark Sullivan and Cheri White

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**The Command Center has received word that the last balloon aloft in the 17<sup>th</sup> America's Challenge race for gas balloons has landed safely.**

Mark Sullivan and Cheri White (Team 5) ended their flight near Buelaville, North Carolina after about 64 hours aloft. Their flight of about 1,627 miles (2,618 km) is the fourth longest in the 17-year history of the America's Challenge. Unofficially, it is their second America's Challenge win; they won also in 2008.

The second place team, Leonid Tuykhtyaev of Russia and Wilhelm Eimers from Germany, flew 1,555 miles (2,500 km) to a landing in Virginia, notching the 5<sup>th</sup> longest America's Challenge flight. They are

the apparent second place finishers. Peter Cuneo and Barbara Fricke, the 2001 and 2010 winners, flew a personal best 1,455 miles (2,342 km) and landed near the South Carolina/Georgia border.

All of the results from the race are unofficial pending debriefing of the pilots and imposition of any deductions resulting from violations of the race rules. Official results should be released sometime on Saturday, October 13.

Place	Pilot	Co-Pilot	Country	Kilometers	Miles	Duration	Nearest City/Town
1	Sullivan, Mark	White, Cheri	USA	2618	1627	62.19	Beulaville, NC
2	Tyukhtyaev, Leonid	Eimers, Wilhelm	RUS/GER	2503	1555	61.19	Elkton, VA
3	Cuneo, Peter	Fricke, Barbara	USA	2342	1455	62.04	Ridgeland, SC
4	Mason, Jonathan	Bailey, Clive	UK	1696	1054	44.09	Sturgis, KY
5	Wallace, J. Michael	Brielmann, Kevin	USA	1255	780	36.49	Lamoni, IA

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## Event News & Updates

Oct 13, 2012 – 5:00 PM

### America's Challenge Results Official: White/Sullivan Notch Second Win

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**In the first America's Challenge in six years to reach the Eastern seaboard of the United States, Cheri White and Mark Sullivan have officially been declared the winners.**

White and Sullivan (Team 5) ended their flight near Beulaville, North Carolina after about more than 62 hours aloft. Their flight of 1,626 miles (2,623 km) is the fourth longest in the 17-year history of the America's Challenge and the first to reach the U.S. East Coast since Wilhelm Eimers and Greg Winker's second-place flight in 2006. This is White and Sullivan's second win; they also won the race in 2008. It is the longest distance the team has flown in the America's Challenge and the 4<sup>th</sup> longest America's Challenge flight in the 17 year history of the race.

The second place team, Leonid Tyukhtyaev of Russia and Eimers from Germany, flew 1,553 miles (2,505 km) to a landing in Virginia, notching the 5<sup>th</sup> longest America's Challenge flight. This is Tyukhtyaev's first America's Challenge race and Eimers' eighth, Eimers has finished second once and third twice. Eimers is also a three-time winner of the Coupe Aéronautique Gordon Bennett.

Peter Cuneo and Barbara Fricke, the 2001 and 2010 winners, finished third this year. They have previously won the race twice, in 2001 and 2010, and have finished second four times. Their flight of 1,454 miles (2,345 km) to the South Carolina coast near Garnett, SC is the longest distance they have ever flown in any of their 13 America's Challenge races.

In fourth place are Jonathan Mason and Clive Bailey of the United Kingdom. They landed near Clay, Kentucky after more than 44 hours aloft, notching a flight of 1,053 miles (1,699 km). Jon Mason was the defending champion in this race, having won the America's Challenge with David Hempelman-Adams last

year. This is Clive Bailey's first America's Challenge as a pilot, but he was part of the ground support team for Hempelman-Adams' and Mason's winning effort last year.

The fifth place team of Mike Wallace and Kevin Brielmann flew 780 miles (1,258 KM) in 36 hours aloft. This was the eleventh America's Challenge for this veteran team who have also been formidable competitors in the Gordon Bennett, finishing second twice.

Three of the five teams in this year's race reached the Atlantic Seaboard, which is certainly a first in the last ten years and may be a first in the race's history.

<b>Place</b>	<b>Pilot</b>	<b>Co-Pilot</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Kilometers</b>	<b>Miles</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Nearest City/Town</b>
1	White, Cheri	Sullivan, Mark	USA	2623.33	1626.46	62.3	Beulaville, NC
2	Tyukhtyaev, Leonid	Eimers, Wilhelm	RUS/GER	2504.78	1552.96	61.3	Elkton, VA
3	Cuneo, Peter	Fricke, Barbara	USA	2345.33	1454.10	62.12	Garnett, SC
4	Mason, Jonathan	Bailey, Clive	UK	1698.79	1053.25	44.21	Clay, KY
5	Wallace, J. Michael	Brielmann, Kevin	USA	1257.78	779.82	36.9	Kellerton, IA